

## REMAINS OF THE CHURCH OF ST. POLYEUKTOS AT CONSTANTINOPLE

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IN April and May 1960 several important pieces of Byzantine architectural sculpture as well as remains of brick vaults were accidentally discovered in the course of grading operations close to the Şehzade mosque at Istanbul in the quarter of Saraçhane. The place of discovery is now an open tract of ground, southwest of the intersection of Şehzadebaşı Caddesi and Atatürk Bulvarı, opposite the new Municipal Building (Belediye). Soon after they were unearthed, the pieces of sculpture were photographed by members of the Byzantine Institute; thereafter most of them were removed to the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul. A further piece (figs. 5, 6) was found on the site by the authors of this note in August 1960, and has now been taken to the Ayasofya Museum. It is not our purpose to present here an exact description of the newly-discovered pieces, most of which we have not personally inspected. Instead, we shall attempt to identify and date the structure to which these pieces belonged.

The total number of pieces found is at present difficult to determine. They include two kinds of cornice, a niche-head, and a rectangular block. All of these elements are made of Proconnesian marble and bear a variety of intricate, deeply undercut, floral ornaments. The first kind of cornice (figs. 5–11), height about 45 cm., is represented by at least five pieces, two of which are corner-pieces. On its corona this cornice has an ornament consisting of joined cornucopias and leaves. In the overhang of the corona is a series of monograms within circles separated by modillions bearing a leaf ornament. Below these are two bed mouldings, the upper one bearing a pattern of acanthus leaves, the lower one a continuous rinceau. The second kind of cornice (figs. 12–14), represented by one piece 2.36 m. long, 0.39 m. high, has a profile similar to that of the first and likewise a series of monograms, but the ornaments are

different: instead of the cornucopia pattern we have here a series of palmettes with rosettes between them. The rectangular block (figs. 1, 2) is carved on two sides. At the bottom is an inscription band, to which we shall presently return; above this is an overall ornament, now badly damaged, consisting of a grapevine. The niche-head (figs. 3, 4) of which about one half is preserved, is the largest and most important of all the pieces (it is about 1.44 m. high and 0.90 m. thick; originally it was about 2.06 m. wide; the diameter of the conch was about 1.20 m). Its face is slightly concave and it must have surmounted a doorway or some other opening since it bears a design on its under-side. Within the conch was a peacock facing frontally; its body is now broken away, leaving only the tail spread out like a fan. An inscription runs round the semicircle formed by the niche. The spandrel is filled with a twisting grapevine in a remarkable state of preservation. It is obvious that the rectangular block and the niche-head were originally placed at the same height; indeed, as we shall see, they must have been in close proximity to each other.

The inscription on the two sides of the rectangular block reads: ΥΚΑΜΑΤ/ΟΥΚΜΕΛΠΟ; while on the niche-head ΟΥΔ' ΑΥΤΗ ΔΕΔΑΗΚΑC. ΑΜΕΤΡ is written in a semicircle. This inscription may be readily completed since it appears in the Palatine Anthology, I. 10. It is part of a 76-line epigram on the church of the martyr Polyeuktos. The original—and smaller—structure, we learn from the epigram, had been built by the Empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II (408–450); the bulk of the epigram, however, is devoted to the church as it was later enlarged and rebuilt by the Princess Anicia Juliana. Considering the excessive length of the epigram, we shall refrain from reproducing it in full. The relevant passage, praising Anicia Juliana for her building activity, runs as follows:

- δλης χθονὸς ἐνναετῆρες  
 σοὺς ΚΑΜΑΤΟΥΣ ΜΕΛΠΟΥΣΙΝ ἀειμνήστους  
 γεγαῶτας.  
 ἔργα γὰρ εὐσεβείης οὐ κρύπτεται· οὐ γὰρ ἀέθλους  
 λήθη ἀποσβέννυσιν ἀριστοπόνων ἀρετῶν.  
 30 ὅσσα δὲ σὴ παλάμη θεοπειθέα δώματα τεύχει  
 ΟΥΔ' ΑΥΤΗ ΔΕΔΑΗΚΑΣ· ΑΜΕΤΡήτους  
 γάρ, δῖω,  
 μούνη σὺ ξύμπασαν ἀνὰ χθόνα δείμασ νηούς,  
 οὐρανίου θεράποντας ἀεὶ τρομέουσα θεοῖο.

The scholia on the epigram inform us that its text was inscribed in various parts of the church of St. Polyeuktos. There can be no doubt therefore that the pieces of sculpture we are discussing belonged to that church.

What we know concerning the situation of the church of St. Polyeuktos fully confirms this conclusion.<sup>1</sup> The *Book of Ceremonies* informs us that on Easter Monday the emperor went in procession from the palace to the church of the Holy Apostles. After passing the Forum Tauri (Beyazit), the emperor crossed the Philadelphion and, veering to the right, went through the quarters of Olybrius and Constantianae as far as St. Polyeuktos, where he changed his taper. From there he pursued his course along the Mese to the church of the Holy Apostles.<sup>2</sup> The emperor's return from the church of the Holy Apostles on the same day included the following stations where he was acclaimed by the four factions: 1. at the Lions, 2. at St. Polyeuktos, 3. at St. Euphemia of Olybrius, 4. at the Philadelphion, 5. at the Taurus.<sup>3</sup> Thus St. Polyeuktos must have stood on the Mese, between the church of the Holy Apostles (Fatih Camii) and the Forum Tauri, but closer to the former. These requirements are fully answered by the place where our fragments were discovered.

The life of Anicia Juliana, who is now remembered chiefly for the Vienna manuscript of Dioscorides which she commissioned, is known to us in some detail.<sup>4</sup> She was born ca. A.D. 463 to Flavius Anicius Olybrius (cos.

464, Emperor of the West in 472) and Placidia the younger, daughter of Valentinian III. In 479 she was offered in marriage to Theodoric the Amal, but this match did not take place. Soon thereafter she was married to Flavius Areobindus Dagalaifus (cos. 506)<sup>5</sup> by whom she had only one son, Flavius Anicius Olybrius Junior who was consul in the East as a very young boy in 491. The latter had at least two daughters and presumably no son. Areobindus was still alive in 512 when the crown was pressed upon him in the course of a popular riot against the Emperor Anastasius, an honor which he avoided by flight. Juliana died ca. 527/8.

In addition to the church of St. Polyeuktos, Juliana is known to have built a church of the Virgin *en tois Honoratois* on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus.<sup>6</sup> She also adorned the church of St. Euphemia *en tois Olybriou* which had been founded by her grandmother Licinia Eudoxia and already embellished by her mother Placidia.<sup>7</sup> She may also have built the church of St. Stephen in the quarter of Constantianae (also called Theodosianae) in which, as we have seen, St. Polyeuktos was situated.<sup>8</sup> It was here that her family estates lay, including presumably her palace known as *ta Ioulianes*.<sup>9</sup>

The date of St. Polyeuktos' reconstruction by Juliana can be approximately determined from the following considerations. The poet of the epigram in the Palatine Anthology invokes on herself, her son, and the latter's daughters (v. 39) the protection of the various saints to whom Juliana had built churches. This suggests that her husband Areobindus must already have been dead; hence the church was built after 512. The *terminus ante* is provided

*historia, forma, scriptura, picturis* (Leyden, 1906), p. 14ff.; V. Gardthausen, *Griechische Palaeographie*, 2nd ed., II (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 135–6; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, II (Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, 1949), pp. 12, 67 note 1, 95, 163 note 3, 172.

<sup>5</sup> See R. Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1929), p. 107ff.

<sup>6</sup> Concerning this locality see R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine* (Paris, 1950), pp. 442–3.

<sup>7</sup> *Anthologia Palatina*, I, 12.

<sup>8</sup> As suggested by J. Pargoire, "A propos de Boradion," *BZ*, XII (1903), p. 489.

<sup>9</sup> See R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, p. 335.

<sup>1</sup> See R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, I/3 (Paris, 1953), pp. 419–20.

<sup>2</sup> *De Cerimoniis*, ed. Bonn, pp. 75–6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>4</sup> See A. von Premerstein, "Anicia Iuliana im Wiener Dioskorides-Kodex," *Jahrb. d. kunsth. Samml. des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, XXIV (1903), p. 108ff.; *id.*, *De codicis Dioscuridei Aniciae Iulianae, nunc Vindobonensis Med. Gr. I*

by Juliana's death, the date of which is approximately indicated in the Life of St. Sabas. It is placed between the death of Justin I (August 1 or 2, 527) and the Saint's ninety-first year (529).<sup>10</sup> Juliana must therefore have died in 527 or 528, at the very beginning of Justinian's reign. This is corroborated by a story told by Gregory of Tours.<sup>11</sup> The Emperor Justinian, he tells us, was apprised of Juliana's great wealth and requested her to make a contribution to the public treasury. She feigned to be willing to do so and invited the Emperor to visit her in her house after a given period of time during which she might be able to bring her treasure together. Meanwhile, she called in craftsmen, handed them all her gold and directed them to cast it into plaques which were to be affixed to the (vaulted?) roof (*cameram*) of St. Polyeuktos. After this had been done, Juliana invited the Emperor to come and, having taken him to the martyr's church, pointed to its roof. "My poverty," she said, "is contained in this work. Do with it whatever you please." In this way she was able to avert Justinian's rapacity. This story, in spite of the fabulous elements it contains, commends itself in several authentic details. The name of the princess and of the church are given correctly; it is correctly stated that she was old (*quod esset senex*) and that the church was close to her house (*erat enim proximum domui ejus*). Even the golden roof is confirmed by the epigram in the Anthology (v. 57). If, therefore, we are to accept Justinian's intervention, we must suppose that the church was completed in 527. And since a scholion on the epigram states that the church was built in three years,<sup>12</sup> we may tentatively fix its construction date as 524-27. The *Patria*, on the other hand (a less trustworthy source), states that the church was built in four and a half years and that the craftsmen were called from Rome.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Chaps. 68-70, ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte d. altchristlichen Literatur, XLIX/2 [1939]), pp. 170-1.

<sup>11</sup> *De gloria martyrum*, PL, LXXI, cols. 793-5; MGH, *Script. rer. Merov.*, I, pp. 555-7.

<sup>12</sup> *Anthologia graeca*, ed. H. Stadtmüller, I (Leipzig, 1894), p. 6, apparatus.

<sup>13</sup> *Script. orig. Constantinop.*, ed. Preger, II (Leipzig, 1907), p. 237.

What we know of the architectural form of St. Polyeuktos is derived entirely from the epigram in the Anthology which is couched, as usual, in highly flowery language. The church was oblong from east to west, and had, on either side of the central aisle, a row of "columns upon columns"; in other words, the church was basilical and had a gallery (*οἶκον ἰδὼν λάμποντα, περίδρομον, ἄλλον ἐπ' ἄλλῳ*). The columns supported a gilded roof (*χρυσορόφου καλύπτρης*). Furthermore, on right and left, there were arched recesses (*κόλποι δ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐπ' ἀπίδεσσι χυθέντες*) which, in the poet's obscure words, "gave birth to the ever-shifting light of the moon." This may suggest the presence of a transept terminating in semicircular apses. The lateral walls were reveted with colored marble. In the narthex or courtyard was a representation of Constantine's baptism. This representation probably followed the version of the Sylvester Legend.<sup>14</sup>

The position of the inscription in the church is indicated by marginal scholia in the best manuscript of the Anthology, *Palatinus* 23.<sup>15</sup> Opposite verses 30-32 is written: "These things are inscribed all round, inside the *naos*" (*ταῦτα μὲν ἐν τῷ ναῷ ἐνδοθεν κύκλῳ περιγράφονται*). At the end of verse 41 is an asterisk, next to which is written: "At the entrance of the same church, outside the narthex, in the direction of the arch" (*ἐν τῇ εἰσόδῳ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ναοῦ, ἔξωθεν τοῦ νάρθηκος πρὸς τὴν ἀψίδα*). Further asterisks are placed between verses 46-47, 50-51, 56-57 and 61-62. Opposite lines 59-61 is written: "There are four slabs on which these things are inscribed, five or six verses on each" (*τέσσαρες εἰσὶ πίνακες ἐν ᾧ [sic]*

<sup>14</sup> Line 73 of the epigram has *ἐν ὕδασι γνῖα καθήρας*; this implies the cure of leprosy, afflicting Constantine the Pagan, by the water of baptism. Concerning lines 70-73, cf. F. J. Dölger, "Die Taufe Konstantins und ihre Probleme," in *Konstantin der Grosse und seine Zeit* (Freiburg i. Br., 1913), pp. 702-3; the author agrees that these lines refer to Constantine's baptism, but does not decide which version is meant. If a western version of the Constantine Legend was represented in the church of St. Polyeuktos, we may lend some credence to the *Patria* (cf. note 13 *supra*) which states that the artists were brought from Rome.

<sup>15</sup> *Anthologia Palatina. Codex Palatinus et Codex Parisinus phototypice editi*, I (Leyden, 1911), pp. 51-2. The scholia are reproduced in Stadtmüller's ed., I, pp. 5-7.

ταῦτα περιγράφονται ἀνὰ στίχους πέντε ἢ καὶ ἕξ). Finally, opposite verses 63–66 is written: “This is the last slab, on the right-hand side of the entrance, on which these things are inscribed” (ἔσχατός ἐστι πίναξ ὁ πρὸς τοῖς δεξιῶν μέρεσι τῆς εἰσόδου ἐν ᾧ ἐπιγράφεται ταῦτα). It follows that the entire epigram was actually carved in the church. Lines 1–41 appear to have been within the nave; lines 42–61 outside the narthex, on four slabs distributed as follows: 42–46, 47–50, 51–56, 57–61; lines 62–76 on another slab to the right of the entrance.<sup>16</sup> Hence both of the fragments that have survived were within the nave. Their excellent state of preservation confirms this conclusion: had they been placed on the exterior, the stone would have become much more weathered. It may even be possible to give a rough estimate of the total length of the inscription within the nave. The height of the letters is 10 to 11.5 cm. and the width of one letter plus one space is on an average about 9 cm. Since the first 41 verses of the epigram contain about 1500 letters, the length of this part of the inscription must have been about 135 running meters. This inscription appears to have been placed in a single line at the height of the entablature as in the church of SS. Sergius and Bacchus, except that in the latter church the inscription is horizontal throughout, whereas in St. Polyeuktos it ran, at least in some places, along the circumference of semicircular niches. Since we do not know the ground plan of St. Polyeuktos, it would be impossible to estimate, even approximately, the dimensions of the nave. It must have been, in any case, a very large church.

We shall not attempt at present to resolve the monograms which appear on the cornice. Originally the number of monograms must have been enormous, since there was one between each modillion. The deep undercutting of the letters has, unfortunately, resulted in the breaking of many of the monograms on the preserved pieces. There appear to be seven monograms that are completely or partly legible, all of the “box” type (as distinct from the cruciform) and all

different. One of them bears a strong resemblance to Justinian’s monogram (fig. 6), except for the horizontal bar at the base. None of the seven varieties appears to yield the name of Anicia Juliana, or those of her immediate relatives.

The Archaeological Museum of Istanbul possesses a large Ionic impost capital that was discovered in 1912 in the quarter of Saraçhane, i.e. in the same locality as the sculptures we are discussing (figs. 15a, b).<sup>17</sup> The motifs that are carved on this capital—the peacock with outspread tail, the deeply undercut grapevine, the paired cornucopias on the lateral face—are repeated in the remains of St. Polyeuktos. We should like to suggest, therefore, that this capital, too, belonged to the same church, rather than to the church of the Holy Apostles, as proposed by Mendel.

We do not know exactly when the church of St. Polyeuktos was destroyed. It was certainly in existence at the end of the tenth century when the *Palatinus* 23 is believed to have been written, since a scholion on our epigram says, “All these things [i.e. verses] remain today in excellent condition[?] after five hundred years” (μένουσιν ἄριστε [sic] πάντα μέχρι τῆς σήμερον ἔτεσι πεντακοσίοις).<sup>18</sup> Strictly speaking, this note would call for a date *ca.* 1025, but the scholiast may not have based his reckoning on very exact information. A church of St. Polyeuktos is mentioned in 1200 by Antony of Novgorod,<sup>19</sup> but it is not clear whether he refers to our church or to another church of St. Polyeuktos *en tois Biglentiou* (near the Philadelphion). There appears to be no later mention of our church, which may mean that it was abandoned during the Latin occupation.

The archaeological importance of the re-

<sup>17</sup> G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines, et byzantines*, III (Constantinople, 1914), pp. 466–7, no. 1242. The impost is 1.07 m. broad, 1.03 m. deep and 0.55 m. high. See also R. Kautzsch, *Kapitellstudien* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1936), p. 176, pl. 35, no. 564; D. Talbot Rice, *The Art of Byzantium* (London, 1959), p. 294 and pl. 33, bottom (repeating Mendel’s attribution and date, *ca.* 540).

<sup>18</sup> *Cod. Palat.*, p. 50; Stadtmüller, *op. cit.*, p. 5, apparatus. Another numeral, (καὶ) ... κοντα, was originally written after πεντακοσίοις, but has subsequently been erased.

<sup>19</sup> Ed. Loparev, *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik*, no. 51 (1899), pp. 28, 60, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Stadtmüller, *op. cit.*, p. 7, apparatus, suggests a different division of the verses among the four plaques, namely, 47–50, 51–56, 57–61, 62–65. There is, however, no asterisk after v. 65.

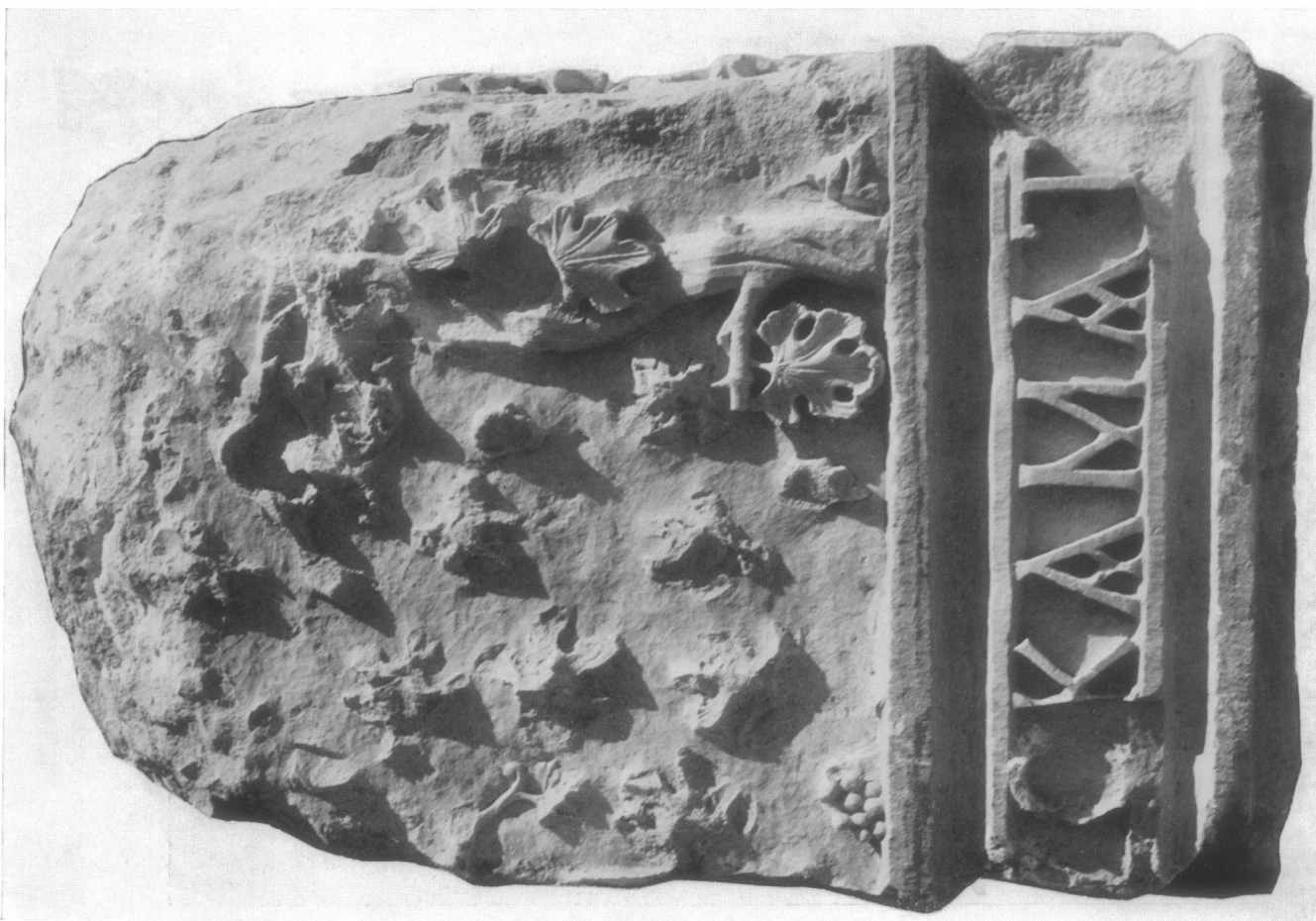
mains of St. Polyeuktos is obvious. We have here a precisely dated metropolitan monument that stands on the threshold of the great artistic flowering under Justinian. Whatever the exact architectural form of the church, it was not a conventional basilica: it appears to have had a transept, and may even have been domed. The sculpture suggests many comparisons, in particular with the well-known pair of column drums in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul, one of which bears a representation of the Baptism.<sup>20</sup> The grapevine that covers these drums has the same, rather thick, twisting stem and the same kind

<sup>20</sup> Mendel, *op. cit.*, II, p. 435ff., nos. 658, 659; J. Strzygowski, "Die altbyzantinische Plastik der Blütezeit," *BZ*, I (1892), p. 576ff., pls. 1-11. These drums are said, on doubtful authority, to have been found in the vicinity of St. Sophia.

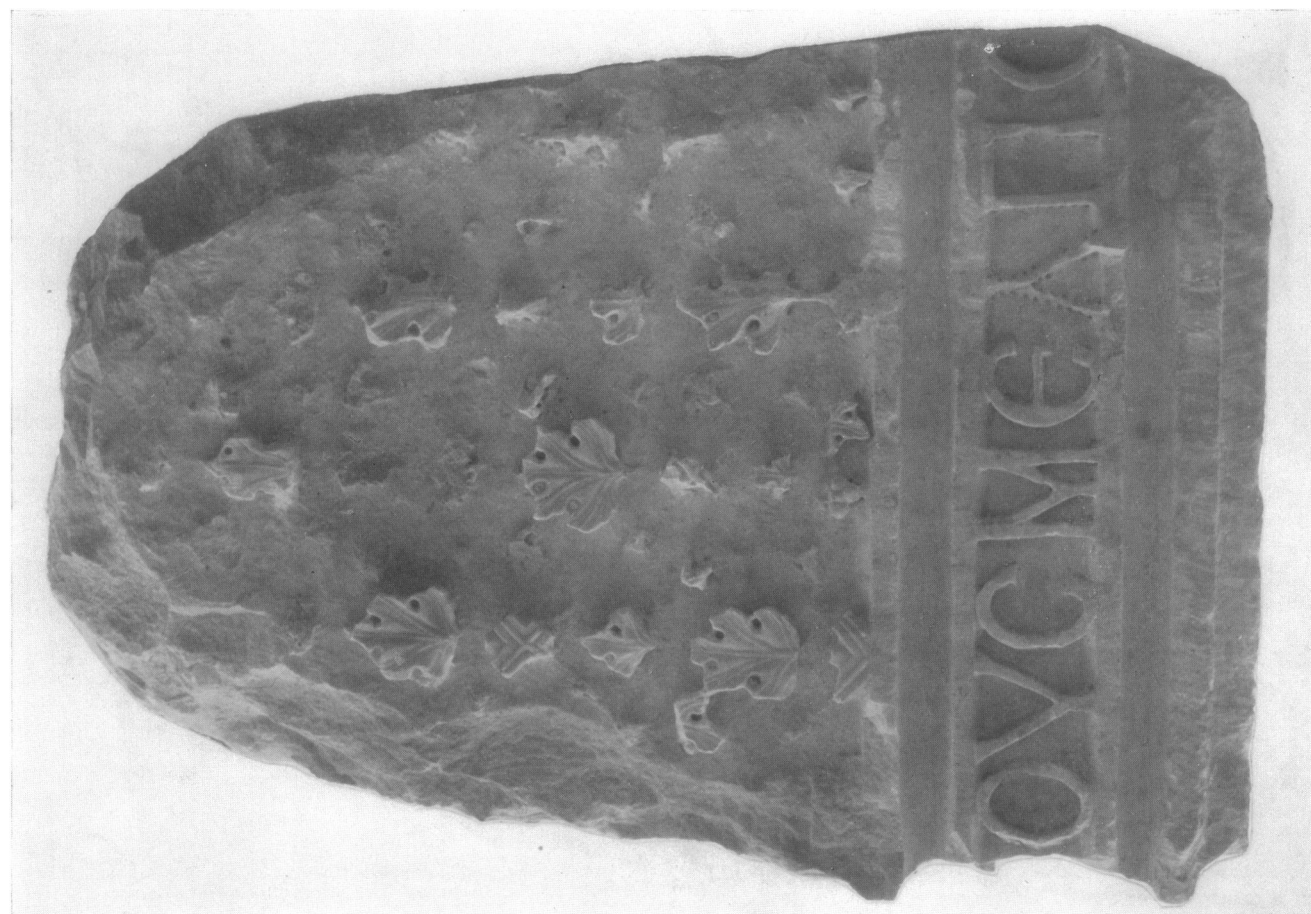
of leaves with salient veins as the fragments of St. Polyeuktos. Maximian's Chair in Ravenna is another cognate monument.

It is to be hoped that the remains of St. Polyeuktos will soon form the object of a comprehensive publication. For our part, we are content with having identified and dated them.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> One of us has previously identified the remains of St. Polyeuktos in a note appended to a report by J. Lafontaine, cf. *Byzantion*, XXIX-XXX (1959-1960), p. 386. Mlle Lafontaine mentions our inscription fragments *ibidem*, pp. 359-360. Mr. Feridun Dirimtekin has recently published the fragments and monograms discussed here. Cf. "Finds from the Site of the Old Square West of the Town Hall at Saraçhane," *Annual of Ayasofya Museum*, II (Istanbul, 1960). The author dates the remains into the fifth century and assumes that they may have belonged to the palaces of Placidia or Eudoxia.



1.



2.

Carved Block found at Sarachana Tetanhu



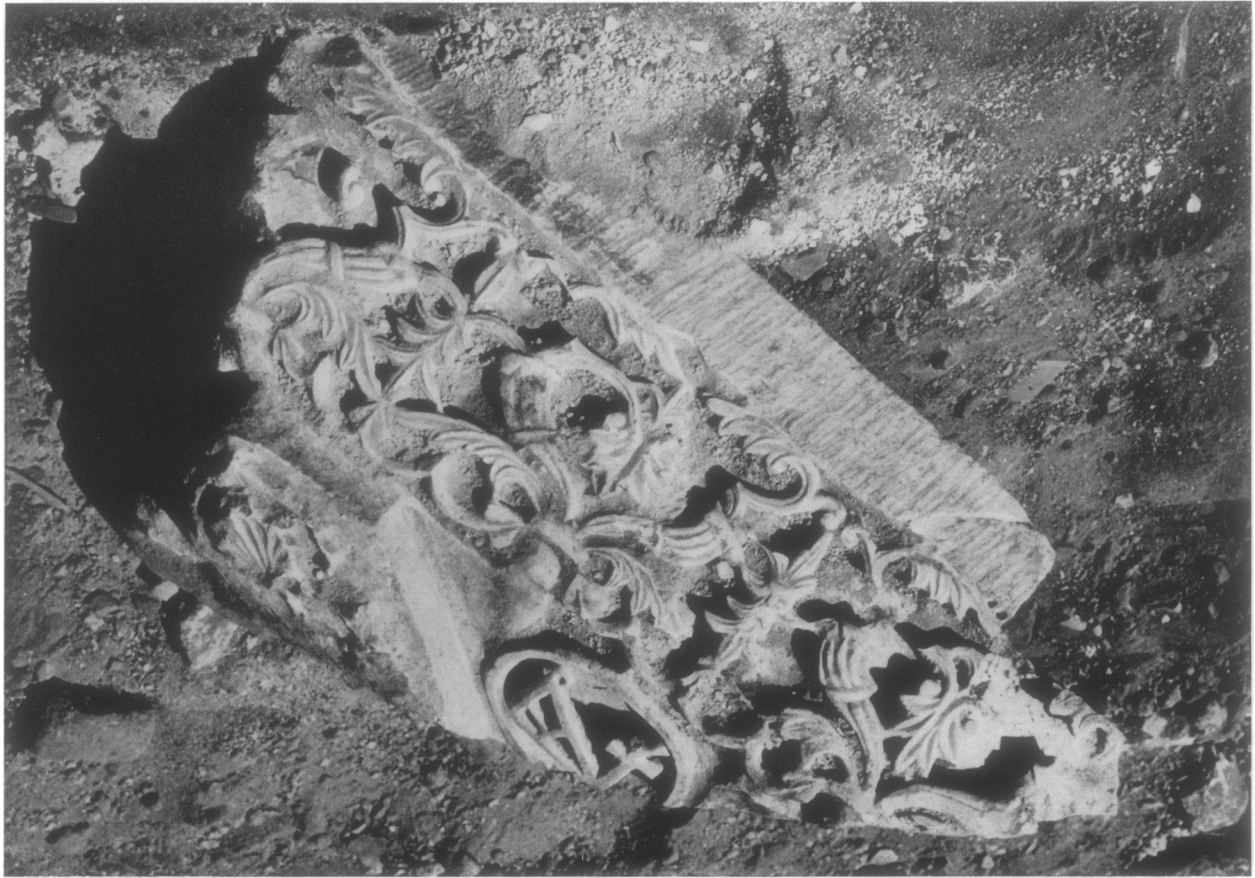


3.

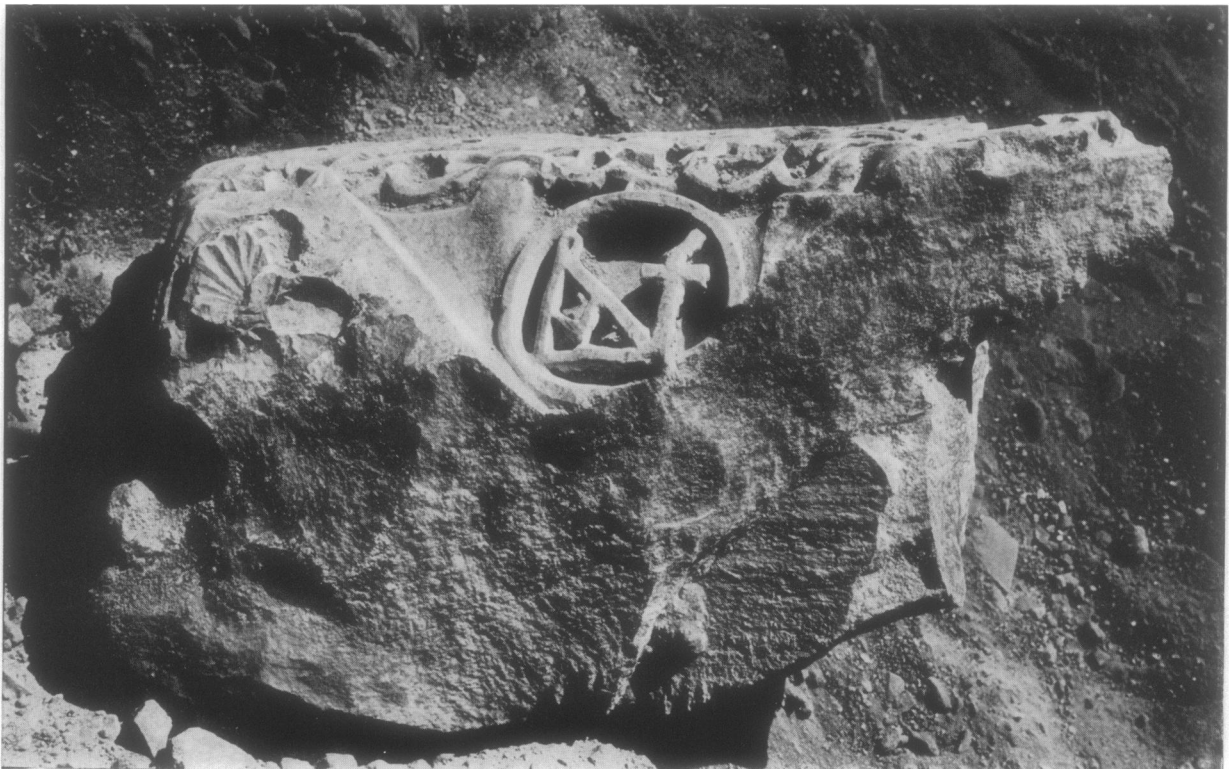


4.

Niche-Head found at Saraçhane, Istanbul



5.



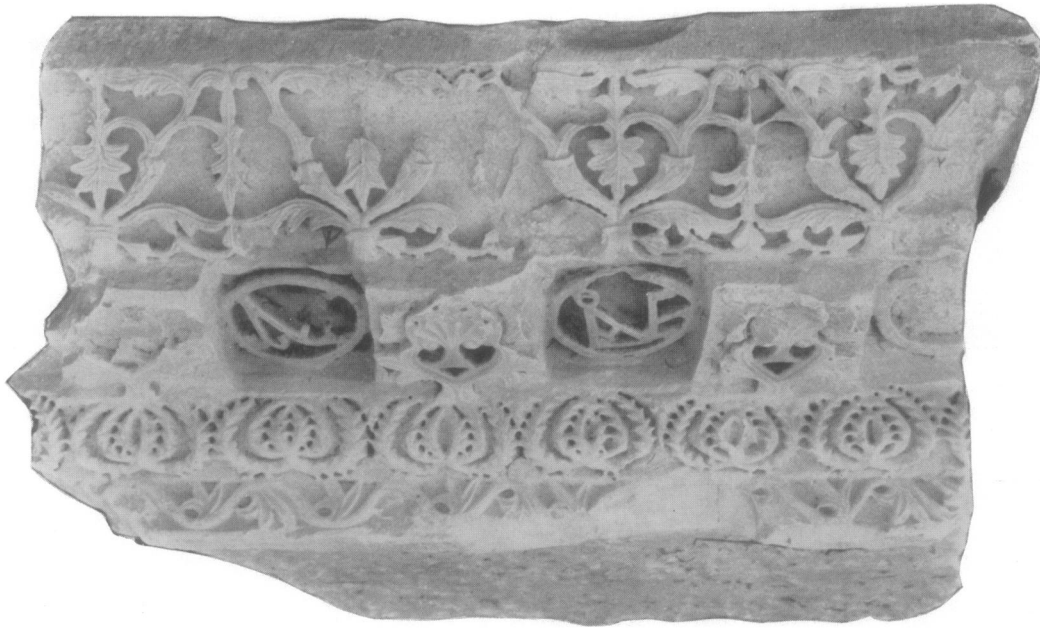
6.

Fragments of Cornice found at Saraçhane, Istanbul





7.



8.



9.

Fragments of Cornice found at Saraçhane, Istanbul. Details



10.



11.

Fragments of Cornice found at Saraçhane, Istanbul. Details



12. Fragment of Cornice found at Saraçhane, Istanbul



13. Detail of Figure 12



14. Detail of Figure 12



15a. Front View



15b. Side View

Impost in Archaeological Museum, Istanbul